

Social Development and Urban Poverty

**Proceedings of a Workshop
Held at the Kentucky Hotel,
Harare, Zimbabwe**

22 – 26 February, 1993

**School of Social Work,
Zimbabwe**

Social Development and Urban Poverty

**Paper presentations and edited proceedings of a
Workshop held in Harare, Zimbabwe
22nd – 26th February, 1993**

edited by Nigel Hall

Contents

| | |
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| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | <i>i</i> |
| Aims and Focus of Workshop..... | 1 |
| Principal's Welcome Address..... | 3 |
| Official Opening Address..... | 5 |
| Keynote Address..... | 7 |
| Position Papers | |
| • Looking for an Appropriate Method of Engaging the Underclass S J G Clarke..... | 17 |
| • The Personal is Political: International Politics, National Politics and Community Participation Maureen Sibbons..... | 25 |
| Country Papers | |
| Botswana | |
| • Urban Poverty and Social Security: the Botswana Perspective Gloria Jacques..... | 33 |
| Lesotho | |
| • Poverty Among Children in Lesotho: the Need for Social Services Limakatso Chisepo..... | 47 |
| Malawi | |
| • The Structural Adjustment Economic Reform Programme and Urban Poverty in Malawi Milton Kutengule..... | 53 |
| Mozambique | |
| • Urban Poverty, Intervention Strategies and the Role of Social Work in the Framework of Structural Adjustment: concepts, approaches and experiences Gabriel Dava..... | 63 |
| • Policy and Programmes to Alleviate Urban Poverty: Approaches and the Mozambican Experience Antonio Siba-Siba Macuacua..... | 71 |
| Swaziland | |
| • Proposed World Bank Low Income Housing Project for Mbabane and Manzini – 1993 Thandi F Khumalo..... | 77 |
| Zambia | |
| • Structural Adjustment and Personal Social Services in Zambia: The Case of Urban Poverty Robert Tembo..... | 81 |
| Zimbabwe | |
| • Structural Adjustment: Zimbabwe Claudius Kasere..... | 89 |

Aims and Focus of Workshop

Workshop on Social Development and Urban Poverty

Dates: February 22 – 26, 1993

Venue: Kentucky Airport Hotel, Harare, Zimbabwe

Contact: Editor, Journal of Social Development in Africa, School of Social Work, P Bag 66022, Kopje, Zimbabwe, Tel: 750815.

Sponsors: Overseas Development Administration (British Development Division Central Africa)

Organisers: Journal of Social Development in Africa, School of Social Work

Participants: To be drawn from Southern African countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Also participants from University College, Swansea.

Aims of the Workshop:

- a) To discuss issues of social development with specific reference to urban poverty.
- b) To facilitate an exchange of experiences on problems of poverty in southern Africa.
- c) To examine the social consequences of structural adjustment programmes, especially as they relate to urban poverty.
- d) To discuss the implications of urban poverty for social work education and practice, in particular, fieldwork.

Focus of the Workshop:

- The Workshop will focus on the problem of urban poverty, looking at issues such as definition of problems, intervention strategies, social policy, the way forward, analysis of students' experiences while on fieldwork, etc.
- Country structural adjustment and economic reform programmes will be reviewed.
- The Workshop will also address the issue of popular participation and accountability, with the objective of making central and local governments more accountable than they are.
- Specific services such as housing, health, community services, personal social services, social security, research, etc, will be evaluated in their relation to urban poverty.
- Fieldwork, with its implications for social work education and practice, will be examined.

Papers will be two-pronged:

- a) Focus on country with discussion of urban poverty, extent of problem, intervention strategies, etc.
- b) Focus on fieldwork regarding its role in training social workers and urban development; and social development training with special reference to fieldwork.

“Structural Adjustment: Zimbabwe”

Claudius Kasere *

Introduction

The post-independence era in Zimbabwe saw the expansion of social services, such as Health and Education, in an attempt to correct the historical imbalance of services available to the indigenous population. This meant that investment was disproportionately allocated to the social services. The end result of this was that inadequate investment in the productive sector could not create economic growth matching our population growth. Many “O” level certificate-holding students were produced, who, unfortunately, could not be absorbed by the stagnant, if not shrinking, economy.

The inherited controlled economy which was characterised by foreign exchange controls, price controls, controlled employment practices, controlled parastatals, and unresponsive investment practices was given a new lease of life under our new socialist ideology which espoused a command economy.

The combined efforts of these developments were a lack of growth in the economy, inadequate investment, high and unsustainable budget deficits, and increasing subsidies. These economic circumstances led to high unemployment and lower standards of living. The effects of intermittent drought and the poor commodity prices on the international market during the 1980s helped to accelerate conditions of poverty.

Economic Structural Adjustment Programme

In January 1991, Zimbabwe introduced the ‘home grown’ economic policy of structural adjustment, which aimed at reversing the economic and social trends of the 1980s. It was based on the philosophy that once the economy is opened up in a capitalistic fashion, then economic growth will be realised. The benefits of the economic growth will then spill over to every segment of society. The ‘Social Dimensions of Adjustment’ were regarded as transient and of a shortlived nature which needed a small and peripheral programme to contain the adverse effects thereof. The later advent to the policy of the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare helped re-focus the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme so that there was now a substantial emphasis in planning with regard to social factors, in addition to economic ones.

This marked the beginning of the involvement of the social work profession in its attempt to seriously address problems of structural adjustment in this country. As a result of this involvement, the leading ministries in this programme accepted the need to involve social science practitioners in economic committees that dealt with monetary policies, price decontrol, deregulation, parastatal reforms and fiscal policy. The Social Dimensions of Adjustment has remained largely the preserve of social workers and other social science practitioners. However, apart from those dealing with the social dimensions, all other committees are dominated by economically-related ministries. This tends to underplay the contribution from social work-related organs.

* Deputy Director, Social Welfare Department, Harare

Social Dimensions of Adjustment

As stated elsewhere, the basic strategy underpinning the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme in Zimbabwe is to move away from social to productive sectors so as to create economic growth. This process is to be achieved through a competitive mode of production where market forces reign supreme. To do this would require liberalising trade, removing controls on foreign exchange, prices, labour, parastatals, and creating an enabling environment for increased local and foreign investments, which will encourage effective participation of the informal sector workers through deregulation.

The immediate consequences of these measures are the increase in prices of basic foodstuffs, retrenchment through frictional competition in industry, the increase in rates which inhibits investment and a worsening of the poverty status of the majority of urban and rural dwellers. In order to cushion those who are vulnerable to these economic growth-creating policies, the Social Dimensions of Adjustment Programme was created. It focused on employment-creation and training on the one hand and social welfare on the other. The social welfare component is targeted on food security, education and health.

Social workers employed in the Department of Social Welfare have developed programmes that grant assistance to those who are rendered destitute by the new economic reform policy. These “new poor” are located in both the urban and rural sectors of the economy. It has been our experience that a judicious mixture of geographical and individual targeting is necessary if we are to effectively assist the new poor while limiting ‘leakages’. Further, such a programme should blend well with existing programmes for the “old poor”, otherwise disgruntlement, and lack of confidence in the structural adjustment programme might result with adverse social consequences.

In Zimbabwe, food security is being implemented through an individual-targeted food money programme in the urban areas, while in the rural areas there is supplementary feeding for the under-fives, lactating mothers, and the elderly, as well as food relief to the rest of the population. The food relief takes the form of food for work and free food handouts. In the urban area the ‘food money’ takes the form of supplementary cash allowances to targeted individuals and families. It is estimated that in a season that is not distorted by drought, approximately one million families would qualify for assistance, ie 70% in the rural areas (those who earn \$200 per month and less).

Educational assistance that ensures the affected population has access to education from primary to ‘A’ level has been developed through individual targeting and the initial identification by Ministry of Education assistance with school fees payment, including examination fees, is granted. It is estimated that out of a population of 3,2 million pupils in primary and secondary schools approximately 100,000 pupils will be assisted. As pupils attending primary school in rural areas are exempted from paying school fees, the majority of beneficiaries will come from the urban area among those who earn less than \$400 per month.

A programme to offer increased access to those who fall ill and are rendered destitute by ESAP is being developed. However, the rural areas have been exempted from paying health fees. This and the fact that the threshold of assistance has been increased to \$400 per month has resulted in increased access to health services, regardless of increased user fees. At present, a tentative agreement has been struck between our Ministry and that of Health, that individual targeting will be undertaken in the low-density area (more affluent area) while geographical targeting will be employed in the high-density area (less affluent area). The local authorities will be compensated for the treatment they presently render to non fee-paying patients.

The attempt to cushion vulnerable groups from the transitional hardships of ESAP has also been extended to the continued retention of controlled prices for basic food commodities to afford the vulnerable groups the basic necessities of life.

The sequencing of price decontrol and deregulation measures is being done in such a way that it will safeguard the vulnerable position of the low-income groups, who will include the unemployed, the female-headed households, the disabled, the elderly, the chronically ill, the under 5 year olds and pregnant and lactating mothers.

When all is said and done, the most important aspect of the Social Adjustment Programme that will help minimise pain and suffering for the low-income group is that which pertains to employment-creation and training. While handouts and targeted assistance are important in the short-term it is only the deliberate and planned participation of low-income groups in economic activities of the country that will bring long-term benefits and lead to the increase of levels of living. According to the Economic Reform Programme (1991), it is anticipated that out of a labour force in formal employment of 1.2 million, approximately 32,000 workers will be retrenched. This figure together with that of the unemployed (400,000) as well as that for the under-employed need to be considered for informal employment through the employment creation aspect of the Social Development Fund. To date only a handful of the retrenched have been assisted. There is no programme in place yet to assist the urban unemployed and underemployed. So far this appears to be our major weakness.

Prospect of Success for ESAP

If we use the yardstick of the modernisation paradigm, then once the economy has grown, the success of ESAP is assured. However, past experience has demonstrated that economic development that does not encompass social development is a hollow type of development. Our aim is to ensure that we score success in both the economic and social development aspects. The prospects to do so are dependent on our ability to attract local and international investment in productive sectors, our ability to develop appropriate human resources, to retool and modernise industrial processes, to invest in appropriate human resources, and for our commodities to fetch higher prices on the international market. The meaningful participation of the vulnerable groups in the economy is a *sine qua non* for development.

The continued investment in social services is the one factor that will ensure the success of our efforts directed at successfully restructuring our economy in order for it to register growth. Evaluation undertaken through the Sentinel Site Surveillance method appears to indicate that the national status at household level has not seriously gone down. The school dropout rate was not unusually large in 1992 and access to health facilities have not been seriously impaired.



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